

# A special place for special kids

## Camp John Marc seeking EMS volunteers for unique summer program

By John LeBas



In his 10 years as a volunteer counselor at Camp John Marc, Maxie Bishop helped kids live life to the fullest when they had very, very few chances to do so.

The children he helped all had sickle-cell anemia – but for one week each summer at Camp John Marc, the blood disorder couldn't keep them down. Under the guidance of caring adults like Bishop, they learned to swim, take pictures and ride horses. They danced the night away and gazed at the stars. No one cared if they wet the bed; no one made fun of their scars.

And that's the beauty of Camp John Marc. The campers come in groups, one week at a time, with children who have exactly the same diagnosis or disability: Some are HIV-positive, others have suffered severe burns, and still others have cancer. But at camp, those differences that set them apart from healthy children simply fade away.

"They just get to be regular kids," said Bishop, state EMS director and a former administrator at Dallas Fire-Rescue. "It's also an opportunity to give the parents a break. Parents know that, for a

week, these kids are going to be under excellent supervision with people who can take care of them."

The experience of work-

cabin counselors. And the staff is looking specifically for EMS personnel to fill some of those slots.

While at camp, kids usually stay seven to a cabin, along with three adult volunteers.

"The counselors are with the kids all the time, really," said Vance Gilmore, executive director/camp director. "They live in the cabin with them, accompany them to activities, eat with them. They're kind of a teacher-parent-friend for the week."

Public safety personnel, including police, fire and EMS professionals, have special historical ties to several of the weeklong programs – those for kids with muscular dystrophy, burns and sickle-cell anemia. It's the sickle-cell

camp, Camp Jubilee, for which EMS volunteers are needed most, Gilmore said.



ing with children who were living with an often-fatal blood disorder also had a rewarding impact on Bishop's life.

"It really made you appreciate the kids who were there, because you didn't know which ones would be back the next year," he said.

Camp John Marc is a nonprofit program that serves kids with certain chronic illnesses or physical disabilities.

As the ramp-up to this summer's activities gets under way, the camp is seeking volunteers to serve as



Prospective volunteers for Camp Jubilee must be age 19 or older to apply. Some will be se-



lected for an interview, and those chosen as volunteers will have to pass a background check.

Volunteering is free, as housing and meals for the week are provided. But it is a full-week commitment, starting with a day of training on Saturday (the children arrive Sunday) and continuing through the end of camp on Friday morning.

An ideal volunteer, Gilmore said, is someone with energy and the ability to work appropriately with children, someone who values children and someone who is a team player.

EMS personnel often make excellent volunteers because, in addition to these traits, they will have already passed a background check for work. Many will have at least some prior understanding of the children's medical conditions through their EMS training, and they are used to seeing things like scars that might make non-medical types uncomfortable. Also, they know how to respond

should a medical emergency arise.

Of course, EMS personnel wouldn't be able to respond to such an emergency in a professional capacity outside the purview of their medical director. But that isn't a problem – the camp keeps a medical team onsite, at the ready.

Life at the camp is much like you'd find at any summer camp. The kids go fishing, take archery



lessons, learn about nature, boat and swim, and more. Often, it's their first time to ever take part in such activities.

The camp, located outside Meridian about one hour and 45 minutes southwest of Dallas, is named for John Marc Meyers, who died of cancer at age 9 in 1987. Of the facility's 170 acres, 135 were donated by John Marc's parents.



This summer will be the camp's 17th in operation. It runs on public support, grants and an annual "campership" drive. The facility's three partner hospitals – Cook Children's Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children in Dallas and Children's Medical Center of Dallas – create the specific camping groups that Camp John Marc serves.

Last year, attendance totaled 2,303, with about half of those kids coming in the summertime.

For more information about the camp, including a schedule of this year's programs, visit [www.campjohnmarc.org](http://www.campjohnmarc.org). Those interested in volunteering should contact Annie Shepard at 214-360-0056 or [ashepard@campjohnmarc.org](mailto:ashepard@campjohnmarc.org).

"There's a great variety of individuals who come together to form a team," Gilmore said, "and that benefits the campers we're serving."